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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SINGAPORE 001788

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STATE FOR DEPUTY SECRETARY ZOELLICK

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TAGS: [OVIP](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [SN](#)

SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY ZOELLICK'S MAY 10 MEETING WITH
SENIOR MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG

REF: SINGAPORE 910

[11.](#) (U) Classified by: Ambassador Franklin L. Lavin. Reason
1.4(d)

[12.](#) (U) Date Time and Place: May 10, 2005, 12:30PM, Istana,
Singapore

[13.](#) (U) Participants:

U.S.

The Deputy Secretary
Ambassador Franklin Lavin
DAS Marie Huhtala, EAP
D Executive Assistant Ross Wilson
Chris Kavanagh (Embassy Notetaker)

Singapore

Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong
Minister of Defense Teo Chee Hean
Second Minister for Trade and Industry Vivian Balakrishnan
MFA Second Permanent Secretary Bilahari Kausikan
MFA Notetaker Lee Chong Hock

[14.](#) (C) Summary: During their May 10 meeting, Senior
Minister Goh Chok Tong and the Deputy Secretary discussed
developments in the Middle East, the Asia-Middle East
Dialogue, and Goh's interest in encouraging moderate
Muslims to fight terrorism at the ideological level. SM
Goh noted that Islam had gained a greater role in the
political arena in Malaysia, which was a concern for the
long-term. Turning to Indonesia, SM Goh thought it had its
best leadership team since Suharto, but its revival would
depend on President Yudhoyono's being decisive and acting
quickly. The Deputy Secretary noted Malaysia and
Indonesia's interest in enhancing maritime security.
Commenting on China, SM Goh said its leadership was focused
on promoting internal economic development. The danger
point in cross-Strait relations had passed and President
Chen Shui-bian had been boxed in by recent developments.
End Summary.

Asia-Middle East Dialogue

[15.](#) (C) During their May 10 meeting, Senior Minister Goh
Chok Tong briefed the Deputy Secretary on the Asia-Middle
East Dialogue (AMED), which Singapore was sponsoring in
June (Reftel). More than 30 countries had agreed to
participate in the event and it would bring together both
government and non-governmental organization leaders. SM
Goh said his main goal was to encourage moderate Muslims in
the Middle East to fight terrorism at the ideological
level. Only Muslims could debunk the corruption of the
Koran undertaken by extremists. The United States and
other countries could help, but it was ultimately a fight
Muslims must win themselves.

[16.](#) (C) SM Goh said he was encouraged by the success of some
Gulf States, such as Dubai and Qatar, in showing that
observant Muslims could also have a modern economy. More
travel and people-to-people exchanges, especially from
Saudi Arabia, were needed to change conservative mind
sets. Economically, the Middle East had to diversify
away from just oil. Politically, these countries had
to implement reform at their own pace, with a nudge
from the United States. The Deputy Secretary commented
that the AMED was an excellent idea and he had encouraged
the Gulf States to look at Asia as well as the United
States as a model for economic development.

Israel and Palestine

[17.](#) (C) From May 19-20, SM Goh will be visiting Israel and
Palestine. The Deputy Secretary commented that Singapore
was in a unique position to share perspectives with Israel

since they both understood the problem of lacking strategic depth. Asked about Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, the Deputy Secretary said that he faces a number of challenges in building political support on top of the electoral legitimacy he won in the Presidential election. Both Abbas and PM Sharon will need help and support. The main questions were whether he could be firm enough and control the security services.

Islam in Malaysia

18. (C) Noting that Malaysia was another part of his brief, SM Goh said that Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi was a good man to work with and wanted to make Malaysia a modern and moderate Islamic country. He was concerned, however, that introducing Islam into the political arena was a mistake and could become a problem in the future. Defense Minister Teo observed that it was self-defeating for UMNO to engage in a "holier than thou" contest with the Islamic party (PAS).

Hope for Indonesia

19. (C) Indonesia had its best chance to move forward and its best leadership team since Suharto, observed SM Goh. President Yudhoyono had the vision and character to restore Indonesia. It was unclear, however, if he had the strength to do so and would move fast enough. Vice President Jusuf Kalla was more decisive, but lacked Yudhoyono's international perspective. If they complemented each other, they could make a good team. At this moment, they appeared to be working together, although their respective supporters were jockeying for position, noted Defense Minister Teo.

110. (C) Teo added that it was important to institutionalize "outward thinking" in Indonesia, especially in the armed forces (TNI). In the late 1990's, the TNI did not consider the United States to be a possible threat. Because it had been cut off from contact with the United States for so many years, however, it had grown increasingly suspicious of the United States. In some Indonesian military planning scenarios, the United States was rated a higher potential threat than China.

Maritime Security

111. (C) The Deputy Secretary said he had discussed maritime security with both Indonesia and Malaysia. Indonesia appeared interested in assistance to improve its maritime security capabilities. Malaysia was too, and it also saw the benefits of real-time information sharing. Teo noted that the foreign ministers of the three littoral states were planning to meet soon to discuss maritime security. There had been a historic tension between the three about how to deal with the Malacca Strait. Singapore wanted the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to play a greater role in enhancing maritime security, while Malaysia and Indonesia wanted to limit the issue to the three littorals.

China and Cross-Strait Relations

112. (C) China's senior leadership was focused on the country's internal economic development, commented SM Goh. They did not want any external problems to distract them, especially any problems with the United States. While the economy was in good shape, there were increasing internal stresses due to the divergence between the economically advanced coastal regions and the interior. The Deputy Secretary noted that China was under pressure to make major

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economic policy changes, such as to the renminbi exchange rate. It was a new member of the international economic system, but it had to face the burdens of being a major economy.

113. (C) Nine months ago, Singapore was very worried about the possibility of cross-Strait conflict, but the danger point had now passed, said SM Goh. President Chen Shui-bian had been boxed in by domestic unhappiness with his pro-independence moves, President Bush's statement on the limits to USG support, Beijing's Anti-Secession Law, and the visits to the PRC by opposition leaders Lien Chan and James Soong. The February U.S.-Japan statement had also helped stabilize the cross-Strait situation.

LAVIN